

11.05.2007

Obey's ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

"I renew my call for the Administration to sit down with us and work out reasonable compromises... It is not reasonable for the President to demand that we give him another \$200 billion for the quagmire of Iraq and then try to reclaim the mantle of fiscal responsibility by requiring short-sighted reductions in key domestic investments that will make our country stronger."

“Thanks for having me.

“I want to talk to you today about the coming manufactured controversy over appropriations bills that will

“In doing that, I hope those of you who are concerned about the level of civility in this town will take some

“I don't think we've quite reached that level, but we are facing an unpleasant and unnecessary period of

“The President's threat to veto any appropriations bill that departs from his budget is just the latest mani

“It is a far cry from the leadership style of another Republican President, Gerald Ford, who once said ‘Co

“This fight is being described as a confrontation between the President and Congress. But it is much more

“Last November, the American People sent two messages to Washington

1. They wanted a change of policy in Iraq.

2. They wanted a new set of priorities here at home.

“What they are getting instead is a president who is determined to stiff the American people. The President

“Well, that’s not the way that things are supposed to work in a democracy. The great decider is supposed to

“But President Bush decided it was still going to be his-way-or-the-highway. It is clear, that regardless of

“The President’s speech to the country after General Petraeus’s report made that quite clear. His speech

“He could have used the Baker-Hamilton report as an opportunity to modify his approach and to

“He is asking military families to sacrifice again and again, but the only thing he has asked from the rest

“At the same time he is pouring mountains of cash into the Iraqi civil war, at the same time he is pouring

“The American people know that is the wrong economic choice and the wrong moral choice. They unde

“It is clear that after the President has followed a course of greater fiscal irresponsibility than any presiden

“So let’s look at those bills.

“Before we appropriated a single dollar this year, I asked each subcommittee chair to look at the President

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

“I asked them to look at the federal budget deficit and to also examine other deficits faced by American f

.

.

.

.

.

“It is no accident that the title of my new book is

Raising Hell

“They are all today regarded as secular reformers. But they were really part of a movement rooted in the

“With that in mind, let’s take a look at the context in which the appropriations fight is taking place.

“That context shows that the bottom 40% of this society is being squeezed out of a decent share of America’s p

.

.

.

.

“One American President said the following:

‘In many countries of the free world, private enterprise is greatly different from what we know here.’ In s

“That wasn’t a liberal Democrat talking, it was Dwight Eisenhower.

“This is the context in which the White House is threatening to veto appropriations bills passed by the H

“That is the context in which this debate is occurring.

“And it is in that context in which we have passed bills - all with bipartisan support - that would increase t

“If we complied with his budget, what would the impact be?

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

“He says we cannot afford the \$16 billion that we have tried to add back for domestic appropriations and

“All we are doing, on a bipartisan basis, is asking that we devote to crucial domestic priorities enough

“It is simply not credible for the President to ask us to spend ten times as much again this year for the ne

“Last year, the Republican Congress failed to even pass a budget resolution and they failed to pass eve

“We then completed action on the Budget Resolution in both houses, which restored pay-as-you-go rule

“The record shows that those are bi-partisan bills. If it was not for the pressure from the White House, I

“If there hadn't been pressure from the White House I have no question that all of our bills would have p

“Those rank and file Republicans who did vote with us did so even as the most conservative and obstruc

“In contrast, this year we were treated to filibuster by amendment by the Republican minority. Last year

“Despite that foot dragging, we were able to pass every single appropriations bill through the House before

“And despite the fact that Senate rules require 60% rather than 50% of the body to vote to end debate, o

“Now, I have, on more than one occasion, asked the administration to sit down and begin negotiating rea

“That leaves us with two choices. We can either sit by like potted plants and do nothing but meekly com

“We’ve begun by combining the Labor, Health, Education and Military Construction/Veterans appropriati

“We have increased funding for Veterans by \$3.7 billion above the President’s request. When that bill w

“The President has grudgingly indicated he would reluctantly accept those increases, but only if we cut o

“The White House and House Republican leadership are objecting to combining these two bills. They w

“They say that our actions are ‘precedent setting’

“Nonsense. During the 12 years Republicans controlled the House they sent 56 appropriations bills to th

“With newly discovered concern, the House Republican leadership is also asserting that this approach w

“The fact is, only once in the past 5 years, when they controlled the House, did our Republican friends p

“I find it particularly disingenuous for Mr. Nussle, the President’s budget director, to complain about our r

“Instead of looking at the ribbon we have on the appropriations package, we ought to be focusing on the

“Now, I raise these points, simply because the White House and the House Republican leadership have

“But I really hope we can get beyond all of this.

“Several weeks ago, in a conversation with Mr. Nussle, I told him that the kind of politics that I believe in

“I renew my call for the Administration to sit down with us and work out reasonable compromises.

“It is not reasonable for the President or the Republican leadership to insist that we must exactly comply

“It is not reasonable for the President to demand that we give him another \$200 billion for the Iraq war.

“It is not credible for the President to make a federal case out of our desires to provide \$20 billion for vet

“The country cannot afford to wait for a new President before reasonableness is restored in Washington

###

* *

[VI](#)

[DEO OF THE SPEECH](#)

(
[RealPlayer](#)

Opens C-SF